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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

OCTAGON CHAPEL, BATH,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF

THE GENERAL HOSPITAL,

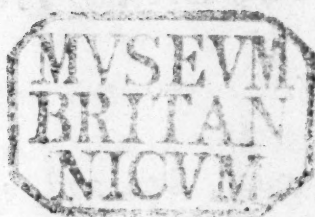
O N

Sunday, Dec. 23d, 1787.

J. Badcock



Cruttwell, Printer.



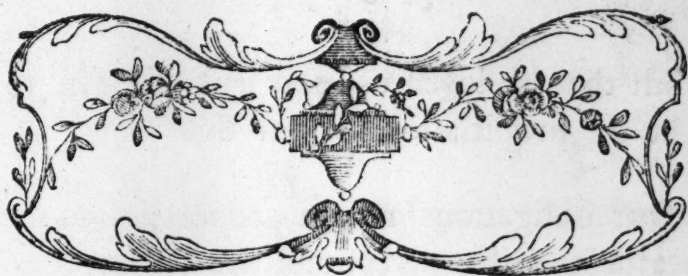
THE following Discourse was not composed with the most distant view to publication. It was written in much haste, and amidst many avocations. A few copies only are printed for private inspection: because (having been delivered under much embarrassment) it was very imperfectly heard.

The Author by no means presumes to challenge criticism, by offering this sermon to the public eye. His friends, he hopes, will give him credit for meaning well: and if they approve of his attempt, he will think himself fully recompensed.

S. BADCOCK.

Bath, Dec. 26, 1787.

N. B. What is included between [] was omitted in
preaching, for the sake of shortening the discourse.



I JOHN iv. II.

BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE OUGHT
ALSO TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

THIS conclusion from the great argument of divine mercy, in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ, is so direct and obvious, that not to perceive its truth would argue a blinded understanding, and not to feel its force, a perverse will and a hardened heart.

“ In this” (says the Apostle) “ was manifested the love of God towards us, because
“ that God sent his only-begotten son into
“ the world that we might live through him.
“ Herein is love; not that we loved God,
A 3 “ but

“ but that he loved us, and sent his son to
“ be the propitiation for our sins.”

Our obligations rise in proportion to the greatness of the mercy, and the little ground we had to expect it.

[Our miseries awakened divine compassion; but our merits entitled us to no reward: that we escape punishment, is solely to be ascribed to the forbearance of infinite mercy: that we are refreshed with the hope of a blessed immortality, is owing to the atonement which was made for our sins, by the sacrifice of Jesus, who sealed our redemption by his precious blood, and rose from the grave to confirm the evidence of it to us.]

Such an astonishing instance of unmerited grace, while it exalts our admiration, tends also to awaken the gentler affections of the heart. We kindle with the holy flame that we behold; and while it raises us on the wing of gratitude to heaven, it diffuses its benignant influence around us to make us blessings upon earth.

Beloved,

“ Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought
 “ also to love one another.”

As this is an argument of great and general importance, it at all times merits our attention ; nor should a Christian suffer one day to pass over his head, without reflecting on the obligations which he owes to his Redeemer, nor without asking his conscience how he hath discharged them. Gratitude to him is a common debt ; and love to mankind is a universal duty. There is not a moment of our existence that can exempt us from the one ; nor a situation in life that can discharge us from the other.

But there are seasons when the exercise of these duties becomes more peculiarly requisite. There are particular occasions which more immediately awaken the sense of them, and re-inforce the impression which they have already made on a pious and benevolent heart.

At such a season as the present, and on an occasion like this, the gratitude we owe to God, and the charity we owe to man, become

subjects of more than ordinary propriety :— Independent of their own importance, they derive an additional weight from their suitability to the time in which they are recommended to our attention : for who can be indifferent to heavenly mercy, at the season when we are about to commemorate the noblest and most endearing display of it to a sinful world ? Whose bosom can be shut against distress, who feels the consolations of forgiving love : and when (as *now*) the needy, the sick, and the afflicted, solicit relief, who can deny that pity which he himself hath experienced from heaven ?

That the great duty of mutual love should have such peculiar stress laid on it by Christ and his Apostles, might naturally be expected, when we consider the genius of the religion which they taught, and its tendency to promote the happiness of society, and the peace and interest of individuals.

[What the world is at present, there needs no tragical declamation to proclaim. Not to be sensible of the mischiefs and miseries which arise from the violation of charity and goodwill,

will, a man must be dead to the distresses of others, and indeed have no feeling for his own.

What the world would be, were the spirit of love universally to prevail, is a delightful subject of contemplation. But to dwell on it, would draw me too far from my present purpose. It is enough in general to say, that enmity and ill-will, injuries and unkind returns, would not, as they now are, be the subjects of daily complaint. The rich would not lament the wounds which they sometimes receive from the ungrateful hands which their bounty hath often filled. The poor would not pine in disregarded want, nor the sick languish on the unvisited and unpitied couch, where penury frequently doubles the agony of disease. Charity would supply what fortune had denied. And the affliction which skill could not remove, sympathy would step in to soften and assuage.

In a word, if love were the principle which swayed the world, and ruled in the hearts of men, those prophetic descriptions of the peace and harmony, that will be established
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in the New Jerusalem at some future period, would be realized in the present state.]

But besides the natural tendency which mutual benevolence hath to promote the interest of the world, and the reasons which arise from the frame of man, and the constitution of society, in its more extensive or more contracted circles;—besides *these*, the gospel supplies us with motives of a still higher quality, and enforces the common lessons of humanity, by the sublimer arguments of divine grace.

Thus it binds on the *conscience* what nature whispers to the *heart*; it makes charity to man, an indispensable duty to God, not founded on mere casual instinctive feeling, but on rational and religious obligations; something for which we are answerable to ourselves here, and something for which we must answer at the tribunal of judgment hereafter.

That we are indebted for all our hopes of pardon and eternal life to the free and unmerited mercy of God, is a point so clear from the holy scriptures, that I need not multiply

multiply quotations either to confirm or illustrate it. It was that mercy provided an atonement, and it was the same mercy that placed the merit of it to our account. It did not *make* our Heavenly Father propitious; no, it *found* him so. It did not alter his nature; it freely issued from his benevolence: for “God so loved the world, that
 “he gave his only begotten son; that whosoever believed in him should not perish,
 “but have everlasting life.”

This doctrine is the groundwork, it is the first principle of christianity; but for want of being well understood, some have divested the Creator of his mercy, and others have wronged their Redeemer of his merits:—The former, representing the Father as an inflexible tyrant; and the latter, with sacrilegious rashness, degrading the everlasting Son to the common level of humanity, and the office of a mere moral instructor. But while we unite the mercy of God with the merits of Christ, we secure the gratitude we owe to both, nor forget the fountain when refreshed by the stream.

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As this doctrine is a motive to enforce general obedience, so it draws the cords of mutual love and good-will with additional force : and well it may, when we consider *what* the benefit was that we receive from the love of God in Christ, and who are to be partakers of the blessing with us!

The benefit was no less than the redemption of the whole human race from the penalties of sin, and a restoration to that life and happiness which had been forfeited by it. It introduces us into a new state of trial, and affords us new motives to prevent our apostacy, and new hopes to encourage our progress.

The doubts and fears of nature are relieved by its assurances and consolations ; its light directs us in the most intricate and obscure path ; and its promises support and cheer us under the severest pains and oppressions of human life. The shadows which gathered still deeper and deeper around the grave, are dispelled by the revelation it affords of another and a nobler state of being. And we are assured by it, that the moment
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of dissolution is but the commencement of immortal life, and the grave the gate of eternity.

In the review of this inestimable benefit, a grateful mind finds itself naturally disposed to make all suitable returns to the Being who bestows it: and a generous heart feels itself awakened by a kindred affection, and glows to imitate the goodness it adores. It will be solicitous to exercise benevolence, and to do kind and beneficent offices to all who need them, from the remembrance of what hath been done to deliver us from burdens far more insupportable, and from dangers infinitely more alarming.

[Our expressions of love and kindness to others must vary according to their particular circumstances: and different occasions will excite different emotions, and call forth different exertions.

But to every species and degree of affliction we shall find ourselves called to exercise our sympathy, when we recollect the forlorn condition of the human race, and the pity
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of that Friend of Sinners, who came "to seek
"and to save them that were lost."

Is our neighbour poor and destitute? Is he a stranger, or a captive? Is he visited by sickness, or tormented by pain? Is he in want of instruction, caution, and consolation? Is he thrown defenceless on the world, and exposed to the angry storm and tempest? Doth he combat with perils by day, and perils by night? and is his whole life a struggle with calamity and hard fortune?

Without any undue or visionary refinement, we may find something in those circumstances of distress and misery from which the gospel hath relieved us, to bring the case of our afflicted brother home to our own bosoms, and to plant an advocate for him in our gratitude for redeeming mercy.

Should we have the thoughtless confidence to ask, "When were we an hungred, or a-thirst, or naked, or sick, or in prison?" we may find lessons for beneficence, as well as humility, in the blindness, the ignorance, the superstition, and gross corruption of our
heathen

heathen ancestors, from which we have escaped only through the goodness of Him
 “ who called the world out of darkness into
 “ his marvellous light.”]

“ Remember that thou wast a bondman in
 “ the land of Egypt,” (the pathetic memento so often urged by Moses to the Israelites) was well fitted to awaken in their minds the tenderest sentiments of compassion and humanity to the oppressed and afflicted.

But strong as the argument was to them, it was surely of less force, and far less affecting, than a remembrance of the state of the world before Christ is to us :—for what was the bondage of Egypt, when compared with the yoke of sin, and the tyranny of Satan ? Or what the rest of the land of Canaan, to that “ rest which remaineth for the people of
 “ of God, in the kingdom which cannot be
 “ moved ?”

If any thing could add to the magnitude of divine love in the great work of our redemption, it must be the consideration that we had not deserved it. “ God commendeth
 “ his

“ his love towards us, that when we were yet
 “ sinners, Christ died for us.”

How common it is for men (especially when we come to them with the tale of distress, and implore relief for the indigent and needy, whose poverty perhaps is aggravated by pain and sickness) how common it is for them to intrude themselves into the seat of judgment, and weighing their neighbour's deserts by his sufferings, pronounce his afflictions to be the consequence of his guilt. Thus the feelings of pity are stifled the moment they are awakened, and charity is frozen, as it begins to flow !

But what are *we*, that we should be strict to mark iniquity ? Whose example do we follow, whose precepts do we obey, by such unrelenting severity ? Why should we be full of judgment, when all our dependence is on mercy ? Or expect perfection from others, when heaven did not exact it from us ? Were we *sinners*, when God had compassion on us ; and shall not the reflection soften our severity ? And when misery, from whatever cause it may arise, solicits our pity, let not cold and
 rigid

rigid caution suppress the more generous emotions of the heart, or stop the current of benevolence : but let us candidly suppose that the affliction was the medicine of heaven, to correct the diseases of the heart ; but that we are to soften it, lest it should corrode what it was meant to heal, and oppress the body without relieving the soul.

I speak this, because some of the principal objections that have been urged against many of our public institutions of charity, have been so disguised by the masque of prudence, that virtue hath been staggered, when pity hath been addressed. Not but that in a good heart Compassion will close the struggle, and Virtue will at last join in the triumph ;—yea, and Religion too : for though it frown on vice, it will always melt over distress, and will be more ready to remove the *effect*, than scrupulously enquire into the *cause*.

[The only thing which a true Christian will be careful to weigh in the balance, are the ten thousand talents which God hath forgiven him, against the hundred pence that were owed him by his neighbour ; and the

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only question which he will presume to ask, will be addressed to *himself* in the pointed language of the king to the unmerciful servant in the parable, (now referred to:) “Shouldst not thou have compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as God had pity upon thee?” A question which, in an honest and good heart, will ever render the mercies we have received as so many pledges of beneficence to our fellow-creatures, and convert our frailties and imperfections into reasons for candour and lenity to others.]

A bad man's misery, not because he is a *bad* man, but because he is in distress and pain, of itself calls aloud for our compassion: for it would argue an unfeeling heart (let his pretensions be what it would) to say, “he brought his calamity on his own head, let him therefore perish beneath the weight of it.”

[Suppose we had been thus abandoned by Heaven in the hour of our extremity, could we have rescued ourselves from despair? He may have been a bad man; his affliction may possibly be the fruit of his guilt;—but
affliction

affliction may awaken contrition, and his sorrow may lead to repentance. A true christian will relieve him with this charitable hope; and if that hope should be disappointed, he hath fulfilled the duty of a Christian; he hath imitated the pattern of his Divine Master, and conformed to the will of his Heavenly Father, "who causeth his sun to shine, and his rain to descend, on the evil and the good."]

But if a bad man in affliction and pain call for relief, at the hand of charity and compassion, how much stronger is the call, when drooping virtue gives misery a tongue, and seconds the pleadings of distress!

In that sanctuary of mercy which opens its doors on those who are oppressed by the double load of sickness and of penury, objects daily present themselves, whose virtues as much deserve our esteem, as their miseries call for our compassion.

Some, whose afflictions were the immediate visitation of that Providence whose ways are past finding out! Others, who have met

their calamity in the discharge of the common duties of life, and while serving their families, and benefiting the public, have been attacked by some sudden and alarming disease; or perhaps, by some unforeseen accident, deprived of the power even of assisting themselves.

But as it is a general asylum for the diseased, who more particularly need the assistance of those Excellent Waters for which this place hath been so justly distinguished for ages, and to whose invigorating quality many of us possibly are indebted for the health and comfort we enjoy, it makes no partial discrimination;—the sickness which calls for their assistance, carries its own recommendation along with it. And we, who have experienced their salutary effect, cannot better express our gratitude to the hand which opened this spring of healing waters, than by causing the stream to flow in as large a channel, and diffusing its blessings as copiously as possible.

But though “this charity is the most
 “liberal and extensively beneficent, yet it
 “stands

“ stands on the most uncertain support of
“ any infirmary in the kingdom.”

[I need not inform you of its general design. You know “ *it is intended for those
“ poor objects, whose diseases require the peculiar assistance of these waters; many of
“ whom often having been discharged from
“ other hospitals as incurable, have received
“ their cures, or considerable relief, in this.
“ The inhabitants of this place, who have an
“ opportunity of using the waters, without
“ absenting themselves from their own habitations, are excluded from being admitted
“ to the prejudice of those who, coming from
“ a distance, have not only the expence of a
“ journey to defray, but also to provide themselves with lodging and diet, in order to
“ enjoy the benefit of the waters.”]

“ Rent of estates, interest of money, and
“ the annual subscriptions, form a permanent
“ income in most other hospitals, equal to the
“ expences of the year. But in that which
“ now solicits your support, the whole a-

* Report of the state of the Bath Hospital, for 1787.

“ mounts to little more than one half of its
 “ outgoings. It depends therefore on the
 “ collections made at the places of divine
 “ worship, and on other casual benefactions,
 “ to make up the remainder of its ordinary
 “ expences.”

Since then so much depends on such contributions as we earnestly implore, from the rich and affluent, at such seasons as this, I might lodge the appeal with your own hearts, and, knowing that charity has an advocate there, leave them to plead the cause of this institution, with far better effect than I am able.

A little spared from the superfluities of life, would give essential relief to many that are sinking under the pressure of sickness, and of penury. What is often wasted in needless, or perverted by pernicious luxury, would supply many a cordial, to revive the heavy heart : and often doth indulgence beget distempers, by a waste of what might have been the means of healing or alleviating the distresses of others.

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It will be a pleasing reflection, when our day of affliction cometh, (for come it will in one form or another) if we can say with Job, "did not I weep for him that was in trouble; " and was not my soul grieved for the poor?" And it will add still to the pleasure, if we can reflect on the active exertions of our charity, and view the comfort of others in close alliance with our own sympathy, which produced it. It was this that threw a gleam of joy on the heavy cloud that hung over the afflicted patriarch's head:—"When the ear " heard me, then it blessed me; and when " the eye saw me, it gave witness to me, be- " cause I delivered the poor that cried, and " him that had none to help him. I was eyes " to the blind, feet was I to the lame; and " the blessings of them that were ready to " perish came upon me."

Some of you well know what affliction is, by your own sad experience. Many of you who now abound, have possibly known what it is to be in straits; and if actual want hath not been your lot, yet the dread of it hath often alarmed you. Many who are now in the full enjoyment of health, have doubtless

experienced the languors of disease, or the fiercer agonies of pain.

Can you in your abundance forget the pangs of necessity? Can you in your ease lose the recollection of a sick bed, where you struggled under the load of pain and misery, and dreaded the weight of that cold hand, which can never be removed? Do not former scenes of distress rush on your memories, and awaken every sentiment of tender compassion for those who feel *now*, what you experienced *then*? And would it not afford you an unspeakable satisfaction, if you could be the instruments of relieving the anguish which you pity, and of softening the misery you deplore?

Let me then second your own wishes; and while the current of compassion runs warm within your hearts, let me implore you to direct some portion of the stream that issues from the fount of benevolence in your bosoms, to those objects of distress, for whom I stand a suppliant in this holy place; where the sacrifice of mercy ascends with as grateful
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an incense to the throne of heaven, as the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving.

If you enjoy that great blessing of health, which sweetens every other comfort, think of your obligations to Divine Providence, and shew your sense of the mercy, by contributing some portion of its bounty, to restore the health, or soothe the maladies of the sick and needy ! You can only discover your gratitude to Providence, by attempting to make others share in the blessings which you yourselves have been indulged with.

Your “ goodness cannot extend to God :” —Look around you, and see to whom the hand of compassion may be extended, and what objects may be relieved by its liberality.

And who call for compassion with a louder voice, than those needy souls whose calamities are doubled by the weight of disease ? Who are fitter objects for the generous heart to exercise its liberality upon, than those whom pain and sickness have cut off from the common means of earning their scanty pittance ? Such was their portion of daily bread, when
health

health qualified them for their daily labour! But now cruel disease hath snatched them from the latter; small as the former was, yet it must forsake them, if they continue to languish on the bed of sickness.

The present institution is equally the effect of wisdom and charity: it dispenses this healing stream to those who would be incapable of enjoying the benefits arising from it, if it depended upon themselves to provide such necessities as are essential to their subsistence; especially such peculiar comforts as sickness requires; and without which, the best means would lose their effect. Sickness is always expensive; and in such a place as this, and at a distance from their own habitations and friends, it would be doubly so. Those who are barely able to supply themselves with common necessities, with food convenient for themselves and families, would be rendered totally destitute by the extraordinary calls of sickness; which, as it lessens their abilities to procure the supplies of nature, at the same time increases its wants, and renders the supplying them still more difficult.

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That this institution hath been conducted on a most judicious and disinterested plan, as well as with that compassionate and liberal spirit which is so much the ornament of our holy religion, and the distinguishing characteristic of our country, may be evinced by the beneficial effects which have resulted from it. From the report of the Committee who superintend this excellent charity, it appears that, since its first institution, upwards of eleven thousand patients have been admitted, out of which near three thousand four hundred have been cured, and five thousand three hundred greatly relieved.

To these objects I appeal as an irrefragable proof of its utility: And you who love to encourage what only hath *probable appearance* of effecting a good end, and promoting the happiness and interest of the community, (which is composed of all ranks and degrees of people) will surely rejoice to further, and as far as you can perpetuate, a Charity which is not a mere *experiment*, but a visible monument of the clearest and most UNDOUBTED FACTS.

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We point with confidence to what hath been done; and we look forward with the most pleasing hopes to what will still further be effected by the continued exertions of those “who are not weary in well doing;” and whose “zeal and labour of love” will, we trust, excite a noble emulation in others to “go and do likewise.”

To conclude:—While we attend the couch of sickness, and bend with melting compassion over our drooping friends, let us be thankful that we can afford them greater comforts than thousands are permitted to enjoy, to soothe the anguish of pain, and lighten the load of disease. But let us not forget those who feel all the distress of sickness, heightened by the pangs of want; destitute of every convenience that can throw a gleam on the darkness that surrounds them; without a cordial to revive their sinking spirits; perhaps without a pillow to support their languishing heads; and who only drink of the cup that is mingled with their own tears.

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Let us therefore rejoice to encourage every plan of charity, where the ease and comfort of our fellow-creatures are consulted; and particularly that most excellent and benevolent institution for which your assistance is once more solicited, in which every means are employed to yield succour to the helpless, when it is most needed; and to alleviate affliction, when it becomes most pressing. Thus in your day of sorrow you shall be comforted; and at the resurrection of the just, you shall be recompensed.



